



ACS

newsletter

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Goodbye 'Warden Message'

Hello "Message for U.S. Citizens"



The State Department is retiring the phrase "warden message." We will continue to employ wardens as local contacts and spot reporters in times of crisis. However, we recognize that new technology allows us to communicate directly with members of the local U.S. citizen community without using wardens as intermediaries. The new policy on messages reflect the desire to discriminate between routine and urgent messages to the U.S. citizen community.

Two Message Types for Two Situations

"Message for U.S. Citizens" will be used to disseminate information about routine messages such as voter registration, income tax season, new passport procedures, and other non-security related issues that are important to the local U.S. citizen community.

"Emergency Message for U.S. Citizens" will be used to inform U.S. citizens about events or threats that may affect personal security. These include demonstrations, civil disturbances, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, or other breaking events. Whenever we revise the Worldwide Caution or issue a Travel Alert or Travel Warning for your country or region, you will receive that news in an Emergency Message for U.S. Citizens.

Wardens Yes, Warden Messages No

The warden network - a collection of people who can report on events far away from your consular section, and who can contact U.S. citizens on behalf of the State Department in an emergency - remains vital. However, the tools the State Department uses to communicate with our resident U.S. citizens has changed dramatically. Thanks to e-mail, websites, and SMS technology, we are now able to send messages to our Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) enrollees directly to relay a voting notice or demonstration alert, without using a warden as an intermediary. The change was also made to reduce confusion.



For further information,
visit the following websites:

Travel.state.gov

and

**http://
manila.usembassy.gov/
wwwha008.html**



OVERSEAS VOTING

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE 2012 PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY ELECTIONS:

The first presidential primary elections take place in January 2012. Plan to submit a new Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) as early as possible in 2012 so your local election officials have time to send you an absentee ballot, and you have time to vote and return it.

Absentee Voting Information for U.S. Citizens Abroad

New regulations for overseas voting went into effect in 2010. If you want to be able to vote while you are outside the United States, you should send a completed Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) to your local election officials every year. It's easy to do - just go to www.FVAP.gov, the official U.S. Government website for overseas absentee voting information, to start the process.

We strongly recommend you get in the habit of submitting a new FPCA every January to ensure you re-

ceive ballots for all the elections in which you are eligible to vote during the calendar year. In addition to the November general elections held every other year, you may be eligible to vote in federal or state primary elections, special elections, emergency elections, and runoff elections.

Voting in 2011

There are no elections for federal offices scheduled for 2011. However, your state may schedule special/emergency elections to fill vacancies.

Absentee Voting Basics

Absentee voting is a simple four or five step process.

- You send in a completed FPCA to your local election officials
- They confirm your eligibility to vote, and put your name on a list to receive absentee ballots
- They send you a blank absentee ballot by mail and make it available electronically
- You complete the ballot and send it back before the ballot receipt deadline

If your ballot fails to arrive, use the emergency federal write-in ballot to vote.

manila.usembassy.gov

Appointment Systems for ACS Services

Many American Citizens who have used ACS have noticed that an appointment system has been implemented for all ACS services within the last year. The Department of State agrees. The Department of State studied this issue from 2009 to 2011 and the Department concluded that appointment systems are an excellent business practice. In accordance with their findings, the Department mandated that all ACS posts worldwide implement appointment systems for all ACS services by September 1. The U.S. Embassy in Manila was an early adopter of such appointment systems because they were considered a good business practice.

How an Appointment System Benefits ACS and American Citizens Overseas

Research by the Department of State showed that appointment systems are beneficial to managers and the public. Appointment system allows managers to better utilize their resources, identify service bottlenecks, and track customer service. The customer benefits from this management improvement as well. The Department's study shows that the use of consular appointment systems reduce the amount of time U.S. Citizens spent at the Embassy, speeds up processing, introduces accountability, and also identifies areas where demand for services is outstripping a post's ability to provide services.

How do I make an appointment?

All appointments are made online. Please visit our website, <http://manila.usembassy.gov/service.html>. Find the service you require and click on the corresponding link. Please read the information provided regarding the service you require, then find the section with information on how to make an appointment. Once you have made your online appointment, please print your confirmation page and

plan to be at the Embassy on the scheduled day with all documents required for your service.

What if I have an emergency?

If you have an emergency, please contact ACS via ACSInfoManila@state.gov or come to the Embassy during normal business hours from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Mondays through Fridays, except Philippine and American holidays. ACS will assess your situation and determine if your situation necessitates being seen without an appointment. If your situation is not an emergency, you will be asked to make an appointment online for a later date.

Only emergency passports are available on a walk-in basis. Please be aware that the rules for emergency passport issuance are strict, and a consular officer will determine if your situation meets the standard for an emergency. If your situation is not considered an emergency, you will need to book an online appointment, and return to the embassy on that day. Before coming to the embassy, please read all the instructions for the passport service you need at <http://manila.usembassy.gov/passports/emergency.html>.

Applications for Consular Report of Birth Abroad and notary services are generally not considered as emergencies. Appointments for the said services should be made online before coming to the Embassy.

Remote payments

Currently, American Citizen Services (ACS) only accepts payment for its services at the U.S. Embassy in Manila and the Cebu Consular Agency. Unfortunately, due to a lack of reliable banking instruments, ACS is not able to accept local remote payments at this time. ACS recognizes that a lack of remote payment options is an inconvenience for all and a hardship for some. Therefore, ACS is researching alternate methods for remote payment in order to facilitate payment for services such as passport renewals.

While payment in person at the Embassy or the Consular Agency is required, it may be possible to send a representative to pay on your behalf. If you are paying with cash (U.S. dollars or Philippine pesos are accepted at the cashier), you may send a representative to pay on your behalf. The representative should provide the cashier with your name and the type of service for which payment is being made. If you are paying with a credit or debit card, the cardholder must appear in person at the cashier. It is not possible to send a representative with your credit card. It is possible for the representative to use a card bearing their own name. Unfortunately, personal checks are not accepted by the cashier.

Be a Smart Traveler

In cities across the globe, travelers are often targets of opportunity. One scheme preys upon the known friendliness of American tourists. A man or a woman befriends an American, goes out with the victim and then invites the victim for dinner.

One ploy that has been reported to American Consular officials in various capitals, including Manila, features a group that uses drugs such as Ativan. A member of the gang, who could be a man or a woman, will approach an American and befriend them. After going out together, the gang member will invite their new friend back to their house for dinner. During the course of the meal, the American is drugged (with Ativan or a similar drug) and frequently has trouble remembering the rest of the night. It is only days or weeks later that the American will realize that his/her private information has been stolen and someone is using their credit card or making withdrawals from their bank account. This scheme can occur anywhere, including here!

Here are a few suggestions to make sure you have a safe, enjoyable stay in the Philippines:

Safety on the Street

Use the same common sense traveling overseas that you would at home. Be especially cautious in (or avoid) areas where you may be more easily victimized. These include crowded subways, train stations, elevators, tourist sites, market places, festivals and crime-ridden neighborhoods.

- Don't use short cuts, narrow alleys or poorly lit streets.
- Try not to travel alone at night.
- Avoid public demonstrations and other civil disturbances.
- Keep a low profile and avoid loud conversations or arguments.
- Do not discuss travel plans or other personal matters with strangers.
- Avoid scam artists or other predators by being wary of strangers who approach you and offer to be your guide or sell you something at bargain prices.
- Beware of pickpockets. They often have an accomplice who will:
 - * jostle you,
 - * ask you for directions or the time,
 - * point to something spilled on your clothing,
 - * or distract you by creating a disturbance.
- * Beware of groups of vagrant children who could create a distraction to pick your pocket.
- * Wear the shoulder strap of your bag across your chest and walk with the bag away from the curb to avoid drive-by purse-snatchers.



- Try to seem purposeful when you move about. Even if you are lost, act as if you know where you are going. Try to ask for directions only from individuals in authority.
- Know how to use a pay telephone and have the proper change or token on hand.
- Learn a few phrases in the local language or have them handy in written form so that you can signal your need for police or medical help.
- Make a note of emergency telephone numbers you may need: police, fire, your hotel, and the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.
- If you are confronted, don't fight back -- give up your valuables.

When seeing the sights, travel light

Don't bring anything you would hate to lose. Leave at home or your hotel:

- Valuable or expensive-looking jewelry
- Irreplaceable family objects
- All unnecessary credit and debit cards
- Your Social Security card, library card, and similar items you may routinely carry in your wallet.

Leave a copy of your itinerary with family or friends at home in case they need to contact you in an emergency. Make two photocopies of your passport identification page, airline tickets, driver's license and the credit cards that you plan to bring with you. Leave one photocopy of this data with family or friends at home; leave the other copy in your hotel in a separate place from the originals.

HEALTHbites

Dengue: Facts and Prevention Tips



Dengue is a viral infection transmitted by the *Aedes* mosquito - which usually (but not always!) bites during the daytime. Dengue typically causes high fever, skin rash, malaise, fatigue, and severe aching pains (it used to be called "Break Bone Fever" due to the severity of these aches).

In extreme cases, dengue can cause bleeding from the gums and nose, or even internal hemorrhaging. Symptoms typically develop between four to seven days after the bite from an infected mosquito, although the incubation period could be as short as three days, or as long as 14. While most cases are not life-threatening, the disease can be debilitating for two or more weeks.

There is no treatment for the disease except supportive care (fluids, pain medication, fever reducers such as Tylenol or acetaminophen, aspirin is not recommended). Therefore, preventing mosquito bites is still the best medicine. Wear long sleeve shirts and pants when outdoors, and wear socks –

Aedes mosquitoes are attracted to ankles! Also use an insect repellent - a list of effective repellants is available at: <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/yellowBookCh2-InsectsArthropods.aspx>. Remember that similar to sun block, insect repellants should be re-applied after swimming or excessive sweating.

At home, consider using a bed net, and install screens or "fly-wire" on all open windows. Use a "knock-down" insect spray to kill mosquitoes already in rooms, and coils or electric insecticide vaporizers if mosquitoes can easily get inside your home. (Air conditioning also helps repel mosquitoes.) There is no vaccine for preventing dengue. The best preventive meas-

Dengue is endemic throughout the Philippines, having its seasonal peak during the rainy season of July to October.

ure for residents living in areas infested with *Aedes aegypti* is to eliminate the places where the mosquito lays her eggs, primarily artificial containers that hold water. Items that collect rainwater or are used to store water (for example, plastic containers, 55-gallon drums, buckets, or used automobile tires) should be covered or properly discarded and flush all the toilets in your house once a day. Pet and animal watering containers and vases with fresh flowers should be emptied and scoured at least once a week. This will eliminate the mosquito eggs and larvae and re-

duce the number of mosquitoes present in these areas. Embassy Manila recommends that everyone be proactive in following the recommendations outlined above in order to reduce the risk of exposure. For more information on dengue, please see <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/dengue>

If you or a family member experience any signs or symptoms of dengue which may include sudden onset of Fever (with or without rash), headache, chills and joint pain please seek medical care for evaluation as soon as possible.

DENGUE
For further information about Dengue, please see
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/dengue>



TAXI SAFETY TIPS

Riding in taxis is generally safe but bad things can happen when riding a foreign taxi. To keep yourself safe, use the tips below:

Tip # 1. When possible, use a taxi stand

At the airport, you can easily find taxi stands in the area. Most large malls and shopping centers also have taxi stands. In general terms, only cabs that are authorized by the government to board passengers are the ones that can park under these stands. This also means that the taxi driver is licensed. Never let drivers that are aggressive to win you over.

Tip # 2. Ensure the taxi has a meter

Make sure you ride a taxi that has a working meter and it should be turned on by the taxi driver. Avoid riding taxis that don't have meters, they may be operating illegally.

Tip # 3. Observe for cab similarities

Be aware of your surroundings. Does the taxi look the same as other taxis you've seen during your time in the Philippines? Be suspicious of a taxi that seems different from the others.

Tip # 4. Know something about the place where you're heading

Research your destination before heading out. It is helpful to know where you are going. For example, if your destination is south and the taxi is going north, ask the driver to stop. You can always get another taxi.

Tip # 5. Note phone and taxi license numbers

Taxi companies love advertising. That is why legitimate taxis are the ones plastered with company numbers either on the trunk, doors and roofs. Never get into a taxi that doesn't have the company's phone number on its interior or exterior surface. Call or text a friend to let them know you are on the way and include the license number of the taxi in which you are riding.

Tip # 6. Sit in the back and keep your belongings close

If you are traveling alone, sit in the back seat of the taxi. If possible, try to keep all belongings on the seat next to you.

Tip # 7. Get a hold of the door handle

Don't ride in a taxi whose interior door handle is malfunctioning or broken. It would be very difficult for you to escape a predicament with a busted cab door.

Tip # 8. Sharing alert

Do not share taxis with strangers. Do not permit the driver of your taxi to pick up additional passengers. If the driver insists, have the driver stop the taxi and get out.

In case all of these tips fail, program the local emergency number into your phone so you can call the authorities if you are in trouble. It is always smart to put safety first when traveling, especially in foreign countries.